

Introduction from, "The Negro: The Southerner's Problem," by Thomas Nelson Page, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1904.

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IN this volume of essays relating to one of the most vital and pressing problems which has ever confronted a people, no pretence is made that the subject has been fully discussed. All that is claimed is that an attempt is made, after years of study and of more or less familiarity with some phases of the Problem, to present them plainly, candidly and, as far as possible, temperately. It is not even claimed that this is wholly possible. No man can entirely dissociate himself from the conditions amid which he grew up, or free himself from the influences which surrounded him in his youth. The most he can do is to strive earnestly for an open and enlarged mind and try to look at everything from the highest and soundest standpoint he can reach. If he does this and tries to tell the truth absolutely as he sees it, though he may not have given the exact truth, he will, possibly, have done his part to help others find it.

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It IS not claimed that the author is absolutely correct in all of his propositions. Sometimes the information on which they are based is, possibly, incorrect; the classification of facts incomplete or inexact; and, no doubt, his deductions are occasionally erroneous; but no proposition has been advanced for which he does not believe he has sound authority ; no fact has been stated without what appears to him convincing proof, and whatever error his deductions contain may readily be detected, as they are plainly stated.

Although it has appeared at one time or another that the race question was in process of settlement, yet always, just when that hope seemed brightest, it has been dashed to the ground, and the Question has reappeared in some new form as menacing as ever. In fact, it is much too weighty and far-reaching to be disposed of in a short time. Where ten millions of one race, which increases at a rate that doubles its numbers every forty years, confront within the borders of one country another race, the most opposite to it on earth, there must exist a question grave enough in the present and likely to become stupendous in the future. Next to Representative Government, this is to-day the

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most tremendous question which faces directly one-third of the people of the United States, and only less immediately all of them. It includes the labor question of the South, and must, in time, affect that of the whole country. It does more ; it affects all those conditions which make life endurable and, perhaps, even possible in a dozen States of the Union. Wherever it exists, it is so vital that it absorbs for the time being all the

energies of the people, and excludes due consideration of every other question whatsoever.

In dealing with this Question in the past, nearly every mistake that could possibly be made has been made, and to-day, after more than thirty-five years of peace and of material prosperity, the Question is apparently as live as it was over a generation ago, when national passion was allowed to usurp the province of deliberation, and the Negro was taught two fundamental errors: first, that the Southern white was inherently his enemy, and, secondly, that his race could be legislated into equality with the white.

One unfortunate fact is that that portion of the white race living at a distance from the region where the Problem is most vital have been

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trained to hold almost universally one theory as to the Question, while the portion who face the problem every day of their lives have quite solidly held a view absolutely the opposite.

A singular feature of this difference in the views held by the two sections is that whatever Southerners have said about conditions at the South relating to the Negroes has usually been received incredulously at the North, and it is only when some Northerner has seen those conditions for himself and found the views of the Southerners to be sound that those views were accepted. Thus, we have had exhibited the curious fact that evidence upon a most vital matter has been accepted rather with reference to the sectional status of the witness than to his opportunity for exact knowledge.

A Southerner may be a high-minded and philanthropic gentleman, whose views would be sought and whose word would be taken on every other subject; he may be carrying his old slaves as pensioners; he may treat the weakest and worst of them with that mingled consideration and indulgence which is so commonly to be found in the South; but if he expresses the results of a lifetime of knowledge of the Negro's character, it counts for nothing with a

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large class who fancy themselves the only friends of the Negro. The reason for this has, undoubtedly, been the belief held by many Northerners that the Southerners were inherently incapable of doing justice to the negroes. Happily for the proper solution of the question, except with that portion of the people who belong to the generation to whom the Baptist cried in the wilderness, this state of mind is more or less passing away, and men of all sections are awakening to the need for a proper solution.

In this discussion, one thing must be borne in mind: In characterizing the Negroes generally, it is not meant to include the respectable element among them, except where this is plainly intended. Throughout the South there is such an element, an element not only respectable, but universally respected. To say that Negroes furnish the great body of rapists, is not to charge that all Negroes are ravishers. To say that they are ignorant and lack the first element of morality, is not to assert that they all are so. The race question, however, as it exists in the South, is caused by the great body of the race, and after forty years in which money and care have been given unstintedly to uplift

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them, those who possess knowledge and virtue are not sufficient in number and influence to prevent the race question from growing rather than diminishing.

De Tocqueville, more than a century ago, declared that he was obliged to confess that he did not regard the abolition of slavery as a means of warding off the struggle of the two races in the Southern States. Thomas Jefferson pronounced the same view, and declared that they must be separated. In the light of modern conditions, it would appear as though, unless conditions change, these views may be verified.

It may even be possibly true, as some believe, that, with the present increase of the two races going on, whether the Negro race be educated and enlightened or not, the most dangerous phases of the problem would still exist in the mere continuance together of the two races.

It is with the hope of throwing some light on this great question that these studies have been made.